
Spiritual Formation Part 9

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Barriers to Following Christ Part 3

What Blocks us from Encountering Jesus Christ?

GOD AS OUR SAVIOR

John 3-5; 14-15 Barriers??

What God Desires

Verses

Others ↑ ← ← ME → → ↓ Self

Our Environment and Experiences

John 5:1-15

We have to rise up and follow through! Many people want to be carried after they are helped. They expect everybody to gather around them and keep them going, because they got used to the attention and care they received. But, if Jesus gives you the power to rise, Jesus is the One who can give you the power to continue to walk every day, to keep going. ...*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of (our) faith.* (Heb 12:2- KJV)

Righteous determination requires persistence in order to overcome barriers that hold us back—those that can be overcome by more effort, right thinking, clear goals, and help from others. Obstacles that are wrong, misplaced, or laden with sin are the ones we are to hurdle first. We are to honor obstacles and timing that God gives, and not rush through with matters for which we are neither called nor ready. Our study of His Word, our prayer life, and listening to good, godly advice will be our keys to unlocking the right doors and making sure we do not open the wrong ones. Our determination needs to be governed by righteous desire, commitment, and dedication to God's principles. You are on the right track when it is your desire to smash sin and the idols in your life. If you have the desire to transform laziness or wrong direction into ways you can improve with good, Biblical, quality goals, you are on the right track. If you are driven by pride or just the motivation to excel at all cost, it is a good bet you are on the wrong track and not in this Godly Character of determination—just into yourself.

Now the reaction! Jesus dares to heal a man who is in dire distress, a man whom others have passed by for the 38 years he was sick. And, He did this on the Sabbath! The Law of Moses said that the Jews were to keep the Sabbath and not do any work on

that day. The rabbis had carefully studied that regulation, and figured out 39 different ways the Sabbath could be violated by certain types of work. Then, they added many extra ways in addition to those. Jesus violated one of the laws of the Pharisees, taking out of context the passage, *Do not bring any burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day* (Jer 17:22).

The man had gone to the temple because the Law required that one who had been healed had to make a thanksgiving offering. Jesus knew where to find him, a man who received an incredible gift of healing. Now, he has been made whole and forgiven, and has received a call. These are the same gifts we receive when we accept Christ.

"It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" (John 5: 10b-12 NIV)

What were their real motivations for attacking Jesus? Perhaps, they had never helped this man or done much helping of anyone, and here comes someone who does! Nobody likes to be shown up—especially hypocrites! So, instead of saying, *wow, you are healed; wow, Praise God*, they decided to go after, with vengeance, the person who healed him. Perverse, wicked, strange, or, we can just say, human. So, they found a regulation from their own law—not God's Law—and used it to go after Jesus. It would be like being stopped by a police officer; you did not break any law, but you broke one of his personal "pet-peeves," so he writes you a ticket for driving a Toyota instead of a Chevy. The man is thinking that he is in big trouble. The Law said that anyone caught bearing a burden on the Sabbath was to be stoned. This punishment was not often carried out, but still the man is in real trouble. Yet, he seems to hold no gratitude or loyalty to the One who healed him. Notice that the minute this man gets in trouble, he blames Jesus and passes the responsibility; yet, Jesus is there, bailing him out.

Jesus was violating their traditions; *how dare He do that*, they claimed! How does Jesus violate our personal traditions? How is Jesus being offensive to me? By finding that out, you will grow, and a major barrier will be removed. Cannot think of anything? What about our perceived concepts, presumptions, assumptions, goals, habits, or aspirations? SIN? Jesus tends to get in the way of what we want, when what we want is sin and bad for us as well as for those around us. So, our fallen tendency is to attack the messenger and not the message, just as the hypocritical Jewish leaders did with Jesus. We know in our hearts that we are wrong, but we cannot argue our way out of it, so we attack the person. In logic, this is called the *ad hominem* argument which is an argument against the person, not the substance of the argument. For example, *I do not like Suzie's dress so I do not have to listen to her. I do not like Jesus' call to discipleship; I will refuse to believe that He is God so I do not have to listen to Him.* We attack Jesus because we cannot refute His truth and what He has called us to.

The leaders hid behind their traditions, and as they continued to add countless regulations to the original, the original became too distant to see; they built a barrier of traditions that prevented them and the people who followed them from ever seeing the

One True God and His plan for them. Let us not do this heinous act. They felt they were justified by their acts. We can come up with all kinds of ideas and arguments for why we should stay the way we are. Yet, these ideas are persecutions to our Lord. These are ideas that keep us back from His plan and our continued growth in Him. It prevents us from being effective with others in our relationships and opportunities (Mark 7:8).

For us to develop trust and break down those barriers so we can grow deeper in Him, we have to realize what He is doing. We have to see that His truth is for us today. God is working in this new twenty-first century; God is willing and able to work in you! He is working in international events; He is working in the pressures and problems that come to each one of us; He is working in the very circumstances in which you find yourself in today, whether at home, work, school, or in relationships. What you need to know is where God is moving in your life, and then work with Him. Allow Him to carry you over that barrier so you can be His instrument to yourself and others. Then, allow this choice to endure—to be in line with what God does. Only God's work will last. He desires for us to become good and to grow, and He provides the means for us to become good and to grow!

Discovery Questions

Read John 5:1-15 and make some observations:

1. What do you think were their real motivations for attacking Jesus?
2. What does it take for you to *want* to have is determination?
3. How would you define Determination? How does this help you to make difficult decisions and accomplish God's goals and plan for you?
4. What do you need to do to align yourself better to the truths of God's Word, regardless of the resistance that you may encounter?
5. Consider the Christian slacker, who does little to nothing in their faith development, what can your church do to help them?
6. How does Jesus violate your personal traditions and plans?
7. How was Jesus being offensive to you in the past? What about now? What about your:
 - a. Perceived concepts?
 - b. Presumptions?
 - c. Assumptions?
 - d. Goals?
 - e. Habits?
 - f. Aspirations?

g. SIN?

8. What can you and your church do to be beacons that point to Godly pursuits, and not allow ourselves to be distracted or discouraged?
9. What does it mean to you to have a Christ-centered life, not a self-centered life?
10. How can you better have to rise up and follow through to have a more Christ-centered life?

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